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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
MONDAY, APRIL 2, 2007

In Today's Papers

Government Fund Seizes Ciner Group Media Assets
All papers report the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) has seized 63 companies belonging to Merkez Media Group, including the mainstream Sabah daily and national TV channel ATV. The government fund TMSF, which manages seized or failed assets, said on Sunday it was taking over businessman Turgay Ciner's Merkez Media Group because of secret agreements signed between Ciner and previous owner Dinc Bilgin. The Ciner Group bought Sabah and broadcaster ATV from the fund in 2005, after the government seized the assets from Dinc Bilgin, a banker and media tycoon whose failed Etibank was also taken over. A TMSF statement said that Bilgin and Ciner acted together to deceive the TMSF in their fraudulent actions which made the TMSF use its legal right to seize the companies. Yeni Safak reports some close friends of Ciner quoted him as saying, "They have silenced us before the presidential elections." Ciner will reportedly hold a press conference today.

Presidential Ambiguity Continues

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak and others continue reporting on political maneuvers ahead of the upcoming presidential elections. Sabah says the fact that in his address to the nation on Saturday, Prime Minister Erdogan did not criticize the opposition but instead issued a call for unity by reviving Turkey's "spirit of the liberation war" indicates the PM's aspirations for the presidency. Opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal said Erdogan was testing the grounds to become Turkey's new president, and called on center-right voters and parties to "rally around CHP" to block the AKP moves against Turkey's "secular Republican gains."

Editorial Commentary on Kirkuk

Ferai Tinc observes in the mainstream daily Hurriyet: "Despite President Talabani's invitation to Prime Minister Erdogan to visit Kirkuk and see that no demographic changes had been made there, the Iraqi government, without getting the parliament's approval, decided

to offer \$15,000 and land to Arabs who want to leave Kirkuk willingly. Although, the Iraqi officials say that this will be a fully voluntary act, representatives of Turkmen and Arabs in Kirkuk do not think so. Either by force or with promises of land, it is obvious that the agreement reached between the Shiites and Kurds in the Maliki government is that Kirkuk's demographic structure will be changed. Any reactions to this latest decision of the Iraqi government are silenced by referring to Article 146 of the Iraqi constitution. Meanwhile, the Turkmen and Assyrian population in Kirkuk initiated an international campaign to prove to the EU and the US that there was no stability in Kirkuk. Moreover, Iraqi Assyrians told the US Congress that they were referred as 'Christian Kurds' in Northern Iraq and were not allowed to speak their own language. They said that although they had been living on this land for centuries, now, the Kurds are trying to throw them off their land."

Taha Akyol comments in the mainstream daily Milliyet: "I used to deeply respect the reformist Hatemi. He was planning to open his country to the world, but maybe it was too early, and this did not happen. Iran was not able to develop any aspect of its economy other than the oil. It seems that it will never be able to develop other sectors because economic development never comes with instability and political conflicts. Iran's latest act of capturing British sailors will increase the instability immensely. I always believed in the Turkey-Iran friendship but I am strongly reacting now to Iran's causing continuing tensions in the region. These tensions are damaging Turkey as well. The path Iran is following is not a good one. Whereas, a peaceful, reformist Iran with a developing economy would be good for Iran itself and for everybody else as well."

Turkey Sets Own EU Timetable

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The intellectual Islamist-oriented Zaman reports diplomatic sources said Turkey, facing a partial freeze in its membership talks with the EU over a customs union dispute which involves Cyprus, is planning to finish the necessary political reforms by October 2009. According to a roadmap to be made public soon, Turkey will complete its harmonization with EU criteria by 2013. The roadmap was prepared after Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul met in January with the state institutions involved in the reform process. Turkey is not expected to become a full member of the EU before 2014.

Cumhuriyet reported on Saturday a booklet prepared by Turkey's General-Secretariat for EU Affairs says Halki Seminary in Istanbul will be reopened after the approval of a reform package in 2009. The package envisages meeting the EU requirements in education and culture, and is expected to allow foreigners to receive religious training at the seminary.

US Narcotics Report Praises Turkey

Hurriyet and Zaman report the US State Department 2006 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report says heroin coming from Afghanistan was transferred to Europe through Iran and Turkey, countries where "distribution" is carried out by ethnic or regional groups. Zaman says the report praises Turkish police, gendarmerie, coast guard, and customs officers, noting Turkey has employed a significant number of personnel and a considerable amount of funds in the fight against drug trafficking. The report also says Turkey plays an important role in DEA's "Containment Program" which aims to reduce the flow of Afghan heroin to west Europe.

TV News:

(NTV, 8 A.M.)

Domestic News

- Arzuhan Dogan Yalcindag, chairwoman of Turkey's influential business group, TUSIAD, said European businessmen back Turkey's EU entry, and urged the EU to fix a date for Turkey's full membership.

- The Greek Cypriot administration is expected to make public a package of goodwill measures for the Turkish Cypriots.

- A delegation of Turkish lawmakers will travel to the US from April 14-21 to lobby against the Armenian genocide resolution.
- Turkey has launched preparations for the construction of a nuclear plan that is scheduled to become operational by 2012.

International News

- President Bush said Iran must unconditionally release 15 British naval personnel seized ten days ago, calling their capture by Tehran "inexcusable behavior."
- About 200 students shouting "Death to Britain" marched towards the British embassy in Tehran, throwing stones and home-made explosive devices.
- The Iraqi government has endorsed plans to relocate thousands of Arabs who were moved to Kirkuk as part of Saddam Hussein's campaign to force ethnic Kurds out of the oil-rich city.
- Turks and Kurds clashed Sunday in Brussels after a Kurdish community center in an immigrant neighborhood was set on fire.

WILSON